



An Outcast of the Islands Joseph Conrad

This, Conrad's second, novel serves as an illuminating prequel of his first, 'Almayer's Folly', teasing out the origins of the factional tensions that are such a distinctive feature of the social life of the little settlement of Sambir, on the Pantai river in Borneo, that figure so prominently in its predecessor. The central plot has an almost mythic quality ('A foolish king has two sons who are deeply jealous of each other'), the role of the 'king' in this case being played by Captain Tom Lingard, a swashbuckling if somewhat simple-minded freebooter who for many years has meddled in political affairs in the Malacca Straits for reasons both opportunistic and altruistic, and who has occasionally taken on 'lost causes' as his own personal protégés out of mixture of vanity and genuine good-heartedness. Lingard has previously set up one such protégé, Kaspar Almayer, as his employee at an isolated trading station in Sambir. When he learns that another former protégé, Peter Willems, has disgraced himself in Macassar and is on the point of suicide, Lingard takes pity on him and whisks him away to stay with Almayer in Sambir. Almayer and Willems are mutually jealous and hostile, however, and Willems' response to being 'saved' by Lingard is to bite the hand that has fed him in an act of betrayal that shocks Lingard and triggers a devastating dénouement. Among its other qualities, the novel is notable for its frank, even-handed depiction of interracial suspicion and enmity, and for its glorious descriptions of the physical environment of Sambir, where most of the story takes place. (Summary by Peter Dann)

Read by Peter Dann. Total running time: 11:03:38

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